

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NM-F020-2010-0007-EA**

February 2012

Santa Fe River Canyon Riparian Forest Restoration Project

Location: Santa Fe River Canyon, NM

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Taos Field Office
226 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, New Mexico 87571
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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DOI-BLM-NM-F020-2010-0011-EA

Santa Fe River Canyon Riparian Forest Restoration

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts in the attached EA (#DOI-BLM-NM-F020-2010-0007-EA) and consideration of the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, it has been determined that with applicable mitigating measures, the Proposed Action (Alternative A) would not result in significant impacts on the human environment. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. In addition, this FONSI was made available for public review for 30 days (11/05-12/06, 2010) as required for projects proposing construction in a wetland or floodplain.



Field Office Manager



Date

DECISION RECORD
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NM-F020-2010-0007-EA
Santa Fe River Canyon Riparian Forest Restoration Project

In coordination with the Española Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest, it is my decision to implement Alternative A, the Proposed Action, as described in the attached environmental assessment (EA) on Bureau of Land Management lands in the project area. This action will adequately meet the purpose and need for the project as presented under section 1.2 of the EA.

Alternative A describes the targeted removal of existing non-native shrub and tree species—primarily Russian olive, saltcedar, tree-of-heaven and Siberian elm—while concurrently establishing a native riparian habitat. All non-native vegetation control treatments would follow approved integrated weed management methods outlined in the Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in 17 Western States EIS/Record of Decision (USDI, BLM 2007) and would include the use of mechanical equipment (e.g., trackhoe) to excavate the root balls of large shrubs and trees, as well as manual control methods (chainsaws and hand tools) to remove smaller specimens. Removed above-ground vegetation (slash) would be mechanically chipped and scattered on site to help prevent soil erosion, aid in the establishment of seeded areas, and retain soil moisture by reducing soil evaporation. Excavated root balls would be piled outside of the active floodplain. Fire may also be used to remove slash and root balls.

The Proposed Action is for reaches of the Santa Fe River from La Cieneguilla, NM to the downstream border with Forest Service Lands upstream of La Bajada, NM. The action area is thoroughly described in the environmental assessment. The actions taken will be implemented by the BLM or an outside party authorized by the BLM. The implementation will occur over the course of 10 years following the signature date of this record.

Authorities:

Actions associated with the Project are authorized by the following Federal guidance/policy objectives:

- Executive Order (EO) 13112 of February 3, 1999 (Federal Register [FR] 1999) instructs Federal agencies to detect, respond rapidly, and control populations of invasive species; minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species cause; and to provide for the restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded;
- The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (USDI, BLM and Office of the Solicitor, 2001) directs the BLM to manage public lands “in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historic, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resources and archeological values;”
- The Carlson-Foley Act of 1968 (Public Law [P.L.] 90-583) directs Federal agencies to enter upon lands under their jurisdiction having noxious plants (weeds), and destroy noxious plants growing on such land;
- The Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-629), later amended in § 1453 of the 1990 Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act (P.L. 101-624), directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to coordinate programs for control, research, and educational efforts associated with noxious weeds;

- The Plant Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-224) directs Federal agencies to detect, control, eradicate, suppress, prevent, or retard the spread of plant pests or noxious weeds due to the necessity to protect the agriculture, environment, and economy of the United States; and
- The Noxious Weed Control and Eradication Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-412) established a program to provide assistance to Federal, State, local, or, where applicable, Indian Tribe governments, private organizations, individuals, and State-recognized conservation districts or State-recognized weed management districts to control or eradicate harmful, nonnative weeds on public and private lands.

Compliance and Monitoring:

The following table identifies monitoring components for this project.

Objective	Prospective Indicator(s)	Frequency and Timing of Monitoring Activities
Retention of native riparian species	Stem density (#/m ² or ac) of native species, % existing canopy of native species pre- and post-restoration activities	Yearly during late summer/early fall
Restore composition of native vegetation	Stem density (#/m ² or ac) of weedy species; % change from baseline in the # of acres infested with weed species; % canopy of weedy species; # acres treated	Yearly during late summer/early fall
Erosion and deposition of riparian areas	Visual observation of bank sloughing or stability, point bar building	Throughout entire Project duration
Grazing	Evidence of livestock herbivory on re-established native vegetation	Throughout entire Project duration
Water quality	Levels of dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrogen, phosphorus, conductivity, turbidity, temperature, and bacteria pre- and post-restoration	During NMED-scheduled monitoring events
Ground water quantity	Depth to groundwater throughout action and no action areas	Seasonally throughout the year
Enhance wildlife habitat	Southwestern willow flycatcher, breeding and migratory bird, raptor, fish, amphibian, and bat surveys; comparison of wildlife populations pre- and post- restoration activities	Spring, summer, or fall throughout entire project duration and beyond
Beaver activity	Monitor beaver inhabitation and activity, location of dams, and effects to head gates and acequias	Annually during implementation or as needed

Terms / Conditions / Stipulations:

Appendix C in the EA contains a comprehensive list of environmental commitments and mitigation measures that will be used during project implementation.

In keeping with the adaptive management framework, this project's monitoring and implementation will be carried out in a collaborative fashion. Meetings will be scheduled as needed or requested with interested parties to discuss progress, monitoring, and changes to implementation that result from monitoring.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The proposed action and alternatives have been reviewed and found to be in conformance with one or more of the following USDI-BLM Land Use Plans and the associated decision(s):

The Proposed Action is consistent with both the current Taos Resource Management Plan (1988) and the Proposed Taos Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (2011). These plans consider riparian areas as one of their top management priorities, designate the Riparian/Aquatic Special Management Area, and contain the following goals and objectives relating to the Project:

- Maintaining, improving, and expanding wildlife habitat on the public lands for both game and non-game species (including the protection and recovery of Federal/State proposed, candidate, or listed threatened and endangered plant and animal species);
- Maintaining and enhancing wetlands and other riparian habitat for waterfowl associated with the Central Flyway and suite of species obligate and semi-obligate to these unique ecosystems with the goal of achieving a healthy and productive riparian condition;
- Providing for proper functioning condition (PFC) of vegetative communities by managing for viable and resilient native wildlife species and their associated habitats;
- Moving riparian and wetland communities toward and/or remaining in PFC such that riparian communities would be sustainable, provide physical stability and adequate habitat for a wide range of wildlife species, and support healthy, diverse, and abundant populations of fish and associated aquatic and riparian dependent species;
- Promoting habitat diversity, protection and enhancement of riparian aquatic habitats, increased forage availability, and non-game species considerations;
- Managing riparian areas with an emphasis on protection and restoration, and focusing on treatments that reestablish willows and cottonwoods, as well as other riparian vegetation, to stabilize stream banks and promote sinuosity and width/depth ratios appropriate to the site; and
- Monitoring riparian areas and conducting rangeland health assessments to document progress toward achieving and maintaining PFC.

Alternatives Considered:

The only other alternative analyzed in full was the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative did not address the issue of non-native invasive species encroachment into the riparian area.

Other alternatives were considered but not analyzed in the environmental assessment in detail for the reasons listed below.

Non-native Removal without Native Species Planting: The removal of non-native shrub and tree species without concurrent native riparian vegetation establishment was considered, but dismissed from detailed analysis. The removal only alternative would not move the Santa Fe River riparian area towards attainment of PFC. It would result in increased bank erosion and increased sediment load in the river, which would impact downstream irrigators and aquatic organisms. Downstream water users expressed their concern to agency staff of the possibility of increased erosion impacting irrigation infrastructure. In addition, while the removal only alternative would meet some Federal policy/guidance objectives, it is not consistent with the Taos Resource Management Plan (USDI, BLM 1988), The Taos Riparian and Aquatic Habitat Management Plan (USDI, BLM 2000), the La Cienega Area of Critical Environmental Concern – Coordinated Resource Management Plan (USDI, BLM 1995), the Santa Fe National Forest Plan (USDA, FS 1987), or the Santa Fe River Watershed Restoration Action Strategy (SFWA 2002).

Use of Herbicide to Control Non-native Species: The removal and control of non-native shrub and tree species with the use of herbicide was considered, but dismissed from detailed analysis. Herbicide use is not favored by many individuals and groups around the project area and would conflict with organic farming that occurs downstream of the treatment area. The methods described in the proposed alternatives should alleviate the need for herbicide treatments.

Rationale for Decision:

It is appropriate and necessary to implement the Proposed Action for the protection of natural resources. This selected alternative sufficiently meets the purpose and need for action in a manner which conforms to the 1988 Taos Resource Management Plan, the 2011 proposed Taos Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement, and 1987 Santa Fe National Forest Plan as discussed above.


Public involvement in the preparation of the EA, as discussed in section 5.2 of the EA, provided important information relevant to this decision. A public scoping meeting was held at the La Cienega Community Center on 17 December 2009 and comments accepted for use in the development of the EA. The EA was available for public review and comment starting 5 November 2010 and ending 6 December 2010. During the public comment period, a public meeting was held on 29 November 2010 at the Santa Fe National Forest Supervisor's Office. Comments on the EA and their disposition were addressed in Section 5.2.1 of the EA.

Protest/Appeal Language:

Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at Taos Field Office, 226 Cruz Alta Road, Taos, New Mexico 87571. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.



Authorized Officer (USDI-BLM)



Date

Attachments:

Santa Fe River Canyon Riparian Forest Restoration Project EA